

MARK O'CONNOR

Birth Paintings

Maralaitj the creator ancestress
gives birth to the northern tribes:

Chests and bellies of upside-down people
fall through her V-notch.
A flock of diving birds
they are falling forever
down her vast thighs.
In the Rainbow Snake's belly
an ancestor-woman swims head-down
like a diver towards rebirth.

In the birth-maze paintings, endlessly
heads crush out between bruised bones,
daughters squeezing from mothers,
keyholes from keyholes.

The thick scrum of the dead,
with its shinbone fence defies
the tight ranks of the living, as both
with lifted fists salute the Mother.

Elsewhere the ochred living stand
imposed upon the charcoal dead
as foreground, till the tiring eye reverses.